

The Support Worker of Emile Durkheim House

Velvet was a different story. She'd originally been as good as Lance, but she deteriorated after she got some kind of liver trouble. She had Barrie's disease. She'd known Barrie, and she knew Barrie's disease. If Velvet had the same thing, she knew she was fucked.

I knew as soon as I recognized her voice that Velvet wanted a cigarette. She was too embarrassed to ask outright because she already owed me and she was basically a good woman. She'd promised to pay me back as soon as she got her money from the hospital. She'd always done so before, but not this time. She was slipping. When I gave her five dollars off the little roll I kept in my pocket she got nostalgic for the times when she had money. She wasn't jealous. She just remembered the times when she had a roll too. I think she appreciated the memory almost as much as the money. The memory would last longer. She'd spend the five dollars immediately. There'd be a feeding frenzy for cigarettes. She couldn't say no.

A little while ago I loaned her a few packs of cheap "Native" cigarettes. We agreed that I'd leave them in the office. She could have no more than one an hour. She was to ask for it at the top of the hour, like everyone else who had cigarettes in the office. If she missed the hour, it was too bad. They weren't retroactive. The deal was she had to replace them once they were gone. This is what she hadn't done. She didn't care. It was understandable. She was an old woman, and she was dying.